

Cranach

Lucas Cranach the Elder (c.1472 – 1553) was a German Renaissance painter and printmaker in woodcut and engraving. He was court painter to the Electors of Saxony for most of his career, and is known for his portraits, both of German princes and those of the leaders of the Protestant Reformation, whose cause he embraced with enthusiasm. He was a close friend of Martin Luther. Cranach also painted religious subjects, first in the Catholic tradition, and later trying to find new ways of conveying Lutheran religious concerns in art. He continued throughout his career to paint nude subjects drawn from mythology and religion.

Cranach had a large workshop and many works exist in different versions; his son Lucas Cranach the Younger, and others, continued to create versions of his father's works for decades after his death. He has been considered the most successful German artist of his time.



01 *Crucifixion* 1510-15



02 *Adam and Eve*



03 *Cupid Complaining to Venus* 1526-27

Cupid complains to Venus of being stung by bees when stealing a honeycomb. This is to be taken as a moral commentary; as the inscription observes: 'life's pleasure is mixed with pain.'

Louise Govier: We're seeing Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, shown as an ideal woman for Germany in the early 16th century. So she's very sort of slim with quite full hips and she's showing herself off to us in a very lascivious way. She's actually draped rather like a pole dancer around a tree, looking out incredibly suggestively. She's wearing no clothes, but has a very fancy hat – I mean, she kind of is the definition of 'all hat and no knickers', it has to be said, but she's accompanied by her son, Cupid, god of love, who is looking very unhappy and who is complaining to his mother.

He's complaining because he has tried to get some honey out of a tree and has been stung by the bees and, of course, this is all about the other side of love, when love doesn't go quite right, and the idea that you can't have the fulfilment and the sweetness of love like the honey, without also putting yourself in danger of getting stung.



04 Judgement of Paris 1513

This is the first of Cranach's several versions of *The Judgment of Paris*. According to Greek and Roman mythology, the goddess of discord tossed an apple labeled "to the fairest" among the Olympian gods. Jupiter sent the messenger-god Mercury to tell Paris, prince of Troy, to award the prize. The three goddesses who claimed the apple offered bribes. Juno promised wealth and power, Minerva military prowess, and Venus the love of the most beautiful woman on earth. Paris's choice of Venus, and his abduction of the most beautiful woman—the Spartan queen, Helen—led to the Trojan War. Cranach's portrayal of this subject was influenced by Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, a fanciful medieval narrative of the Trojan War. This describes Paris tethering his horse and falling asleep after losing his way in a hunting expedition, at which Mercury appears in his dream and presents the three goddesses. In his painting the artist teases Paris—as well as the viewer—with an agonizing choice: the goddesses are nearly indistinguishable, and equally enticing.



05 Apollo and Diana c 1526

This painting is the outstanding work by Lucas Cranach the Elder (c.1472-1553) in the Royal Collection. It shows the sun god Apollo, admired for his moral standing and physical beauty, and his twin sister Diana or Artemis, goddess of the moon, who was associated with chastity, archery and hunting. The emphasis on humanity closely related to the primeval forest and hunting recalls Cranach's earlier work and the so-called Danube School. The scene is given a particular intensity by the way in which the figures are seen in relief but also related to the forest behind them. Diana's precisely rendered hair curls around the stag's antlers, which in turn are deliberately confused with the branches of the trees behind. Cranach's characteristically incisive clarity and attention to minute detail is seen here – for example, in the reflected light in the stag's eye or the small swans swimming on the lake.



06 *Hercules and Antaneus*
c1530



07 *The Nymph of the Fountain* 1534

One of Cranach's most beguiling compositions is the so-called *Nymph of the Fountain*. This reclining figure derives from classical marbles. After the earliest dated version of 1518, he painted several variants.



08 *Adam and Eve* 1526

Cranach was equally successful in somewhat naive mythological scenes which nearly always feature at least one slim female figure, naked but for a transparent drape or a large hat.

These are mostly in narrow upright formats; examples are several of Venus, alone or with Cupid, who has sometimes stolen a honeycomb, and complains to Venus that he has been stung by a bee (Weimar, 1530; Berlin, 1534). Diana with Apollo, shooting a bow, and Hercules sitting at the spinning-wheel mocked by Omphale and her maids are other such subjects. A similar approach was taken with the biblical subjects of Salome and Adam and Eve.

These subjects were produced early in his career, when they show Italian influences including that of Jacopo de' Barberi, who was at the court of Saxony for a period up to 1505. They then become rare until after the death of Frederick the Wise. The later nudes are in a distinctive style which abandons Italian influence for a revival of Late Gothic style, with small heads, narrow shoulders, high breasts and waists. The poses become more frankly seductive and even exhibitionist.



09 *Martin Luther* 1525

The largest proportion of Cranach's output is of portraits, and it is chiefly thanks to him that we know what the German Reformers and their princely adherents looked like. He painted not only Martin Luther himself but also Luther's wife, mother and father. He also depicted leading Catholics like Albert of Brandenburg, archbishop elector of Mainz, Anthony Granvelle and the Duke of Alva.

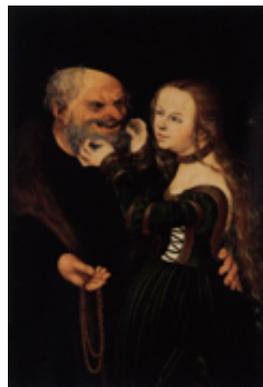
A dozen likenesses of Frederick III and his brother John are dated 1532. It is characteristic of Cranach's prolific output, and a proof that he used a large workshop, that he received payment at Wittenberg in 1533 for "sixty pairs of portraits of the elector and his brother" on one day. Inevitably the quality of such works is variable.



10 *Portrait of a Woman* c1525



**11 *III Matched Couple*
Young Man and Old Woman 1520-22**



**12 *III Matched Couple*
Girl and Old Man c1530**



14 *The Fountain of Youth* 1546

Together with Albrecht Dürer, Lucas Cranach was among the most important 16th-century German painters. His oeuvre includes religious compositions as well as portraits and mythological works. In the latter the female nudes depart from Italian canons of proportion and constitute a quintessentially German prototype of notable sensuality. The present panel depicts the nymph of the Castalian spring, whose water was drunk by philosophers and poets in search of inspiration. The nymph lies on a thick grassy bank in an unnatural pose, her head leaning on her right arm, her body turned towards the viewer and her left leg crossed over. Behind her, a succession of receding planes create a sense of depth. The subject of the composition combines references to classical antiquity with the influence of Italian art. The nymph's pose recalls that of Giorgione's Venus in the Dresden Gemäldegalerie, while Titian's Venuses are suggested in the presence of the cartouche at the upper left corner that bears the text of a Latin poem. The quiver with arrows and

the bow resting against the tree may refer to Diana the Huntress or to Cupid, who traditionally accompanies Venus.



15 *Allegory of Melancholy* 1532